



OSWER Innovations Pilot

Environmentally Beneficial Behavior Placement in Television Shows

The Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) initiated a series of innovative pilots to test new ideas and strategies for environmental and public health protection to make OSWER programs more efficient, effective, and user-friendly. A small amount of money is set aside to fund creative proposals. The creative projects test approaches to waste minimization, energy recovery, recycling, land revitalization, and homeland security that may be replicated across various sectors, industries, communities, and regions. We hope these pilots will pave the way for programmatic and policy recommendations by demonstrating the environmental and economic benefits of creative, innovative approaches to the difficult environmental challenges we face today.

BACKGROUND

Television shows and movies can have both a positive and negative influence on public behavior. For example, research from a 2001 Dartmouth College study suggests that mass media portrayals of smoking among favored movie stars contributes to adolescent smoking. According to a June 1998 article in *Business Week*, sales of Reese's Pieces candy rose 66 percent in three months after they were featured in the movie *ET The Extra-Terrestrial*. Similarly, Junior Mints increased their name recognition when they were comic fodder for a *Seinfeld* episode.

While product placement can be expensive—major corporations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to embed messages promoting their products in the popular media—it also has been successfully undertaken by small businesses. For example, *Seinfeld* turned Love Discount Stores, H&H Bagels, and Tom's Restaurant, all small businesses, into nationally recognized “stars.” Rather than spending money, these small businesses spent time lobbying studios to include their products or storefronts in television programs or movies. While many persistent businesses have been successful in bringing their products to the big screen, never before has an organization dedicated to increasing public support for environmental stewardship attempted such a feat.

PILOT APPROACH

U.S. EPA's Region 9 Office of Strategic Planning and Partnerships and EPA Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) will adopt the private sector concept of “product placement” to place environmentally beneficial behavior (EBB) in television shows. Possible examples include having actors bring cloth bags to the grocery store, recycle soda cans, use worm bins, and consider how to properly dispose of a computer monitor and other electronic waste accumulating in their closets. We have chosen to focus on TV shows, rather than movies, since they have shorter turn around time from conception to screening and the likelihood of repeat showings is greater.

The Pilot will assemble an advisory team consisting of representatives from the solid waste arena, television studios, product placement firms, the Environmental Media Association, and large businesses that could benefit from this campaign, such as soda companies, grocery stores, and organic food processors. These teams will determine which EBBs to focus on; identify target markets, products, and shows; negotiate with studios; and determine how to influence the quality and quantity of the placements. Following negotiations, EBBs will be placed in television shows, with a goal of making the practice an accepted industry behavior. We will also attempt to partner with companies to incorporate EBB into their product placement efforts. Concurrently, EPA's Region 9 press office will work

with the press offices of the selected shows to publicize this campaign and its results.

INNOVATION

This project would be the first of its kind in the United States. No environmental organization has made a concerted effort to mimic the private sector product placement approach to influence public behavior in the environmental arena. The Pilot also promotes a more innovative culture within the targeted television industry.

BENEFITS

This Pilot seeks to change the behaviors and habits of the U.S. public, encouraging them to engage in recycling, waste minimization, and energy conservation. By demonstrating these behaviors on prime time television, we expect to increase public support for environmental stewardship. EBB placement in popular television shows has the potential to change the public's behavior, which in turn will reduce waste, conserve energy, and increase recycling. In addition, the project will result in the development of a model program and guide that can be emulated in other EPA Regions.

CONTACTS

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For additional information, visit the EPA OSWER Innovations web site at: www.epa.gov/oswer/IWG.htm.